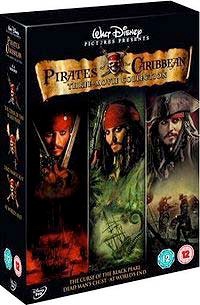
Understanding Action Adventure Films



This genre of films appeals to a family audience. The stories often pick up on the characters and type of stories that children have come across in children’s books – pirates, swashbuckling heroes, a quest for lost treasure and lots of adventures with monsters and exotic locations such as ancient Egypt. The most successful action adventure films include **Spielberg’s Raiders of the Lost Ark franchise**, and **Pirates of the Caribbean trilogy**.



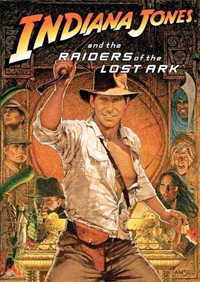
**Pirates of the Caribbean** is a series of adventure films directed by Gore Verbinski,  and produced by Jerry Bruckheimer for Walt Disney. The three main characters are Captain Jack Sparrow (Johnny Depp), Will Turner (Orlando Bloom), and Elizabeth Swann (Keira Knightley).

The first film in 2003 was **Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pear**l, followed by **Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest** in 2006.

The sequel broke box office records worldwide the day of its premiere.

The third film in the series, **Pirates of the Caribbean: At World’s End** was released in 2007. So far, the film franchise has grossed over $2.68 billion worldwide.

The next film without Keira Knightly but with Johnny Depp **Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides**, is set to be released in **2011**.



**Indiana Jones and Raiders of the Lost Ark** was the top box office film of 1981, with five Academy Awards in 1982, including Best Picture.

The film’s popular success led to three more films, **Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom** (1984),

**Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade** (1989),

and **Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull** (2008),

**a television series, The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles** (1992-1996),

and **15 video games as of 2009**.

Codes and Conventions of Action Adventure Films

**NARRATIVE**

Narrative led films with tightly woven story arcs, where the dialogue drives the plot rather than builds character.

An action adventure film is essentially one long quest with a succession of different chase sequences, each one more death defying and seemingly impossible than the one before. The trick for the producers is to ramp up the tension as the film progresses to a storming end sequence. Will our intrepid explorers make it, or will the evil antagonist get there first.

A strong story ark of a quest for treasure, or an incredibly valuable object, or an item which has occult power.

Love interest that both hinders and supports the main quest.

A fast moving narrative with constant set backs that are overcome one by one, leading to fairly complex plots.

In many respects this genre of films derive their energy from being more exciting, more adult and much more dangerous versions of children’s stories of adventure such as **Enid Blighton’s Famous Five** or **Arthur Ransome’s Swallows and Amazons**.

Thrilling action where the protagonist saves his fellow travellers through a variety of non realistic but apparently logical escapades.

**CHARACTERS & LOCATIONS**

* These are not realistic films, although the characters must be believable. They are set in a stereotypical world of the not too distant past e.g the 1930s, or the fictional world of storybook adventures e.g. The high seas of the 19th century.
* A main protagonist who is a recognisably normal guy, and who just happens to have amazing powers of endurance in the face of extreme danger, and is also very clever. Indiana Jones is an archaeology lecturer in an US university. Captain Jack Sparrow is at first an ordinary good for nothing pirate with incredible agility and luck, although he later takes on supernatural powers.
* There are always helpers who are a team of innocent characters who happen to get caught up in the action.
* Humorous dialogue often diffuses taught and sometimes frightening situations.
* The characters take the twist and turns of the plot very seriously as they are often in mortal danger from an assortment of unusual animals, machines and monsters orchestrated by an evil antagonist.
* Exotic locations where the characters have to contend with extremes of climate, as well as evil forces.
* The aim is to please the audience by keeping them on the edge of their seats through a series of mind boggling chases, exotic locations and hair raising adventures in historically inaccurate but somehow elementally possible settings.
* Action Adventure films are designed to create an action-filled, energetic experience for the audience who can live vicariously through the exotic locations, conquests, explorations, struggles and situations that confront the main characters.

**HISTORY**

Action Adventure stories have always been very popular and the films share elements with other genres such as fantasy and sci-fi. Personally I do not feel that the modern thriller is within this genre, as it is too violent, too psychological and too concerned with character. The **Die Hard franchise** could probably be included as it is so tongue in cheek, but arguably not the **Bourne Conspiracy films** which are too serious.

The early Action Adventure films were adapted from novels where the genre originated (i.e., **King Solomon’s Mines** (1937 and 1950), **The Thief of Bagdad** (1924 and 1940), **The Three Musketeers** (1916, 1921, 1933, 1935, 1948, 1973, and 1993), and **The Prisoner of Zenda** (1937, 1952)).

**ACTIVITIES**

The genre is broad and could include modern films such as the films…



The current – 2010 - Ridley Scott **Robin Hood** should be an ideal example with a modern twist, although not as fun as the Pirates films.

It is tagged ‘the unknown story of how the man became the legend’. It certainly includes all the elements of an action adventure film - plenty of bow and arrow action, love interest, a feisty all action heroic protagonist, plenty of set backs, even if the quest is slightly different as it is for the protagonist to become a legend.

* Watch the film – or the trailer for a classroom activity.
* Identify as many codes and conventions of action adventure films as possible.
* Identify the way the director has ‘refreshed’ the genre.
* Study the representations in the film.
* Discuss who the target audience is and why.
* Look for Todorov’s narrative stages – equilibrium, disruption, recognition of disruption, attempt to repair disruption and change to a new equilibrium.
* Discuss how the quest is set up with the father’s ‘prophecy’ at the beginning.

**REPRESENTATIONS**

Look carefully at the representations in the film. Do the main characters conform to representations that we can understand as real people.

Is Robin a hyper real superhero (Superman?) or is he down to earth and essentially human – what events and details display his character.

Maid Marian is arguably the most modern individual represented in the film – why?

In any film look at:

* How different genders are represented.
* How different age groups are represented.
* How the representations construct our emotional connection with the characters.
* What effects the representations have on the audience.
* Whether the representations can be interpreted in different ways.